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S E C R E T VIENNA 000607

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA CONTINUES TO SUPPORT HIZBALLAH DESIGNATION

REF: A) STATE 34900 B) VIENNA 437

Classified By: ECONOMIC/POLITICAL COUNSELOR GREGORY E. PHILLIPS FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (S) On March 1, Econ Unit Chief met with Johann Froehlich, Head of the MFA's Justice and Home Affairs Division, to deliver ref A talking points. Froehlich reiterated that Austria continues to support Clearinghouse designation of Lebanese Hizballah. "Austria," in Froehlich's words, "was not the problem." In a February 28 discussion with EconPol Counselor and Pol Unit Chief, Ralph Scheide, the MFA's Director for the Middle East and Africa, also emphasized that Austria supported the Hizballah designation, but noted that several EU Member States continued to oppose the designation.

2. (S) Froehlich welcomed the additional information in ref 1A. He added that this level of information was particularly useful for small- and medium-sized Member States that had no independent intelligence-gathering capabilities in the region. Froehlich admitted that Austria often relied on intelligence from the larger Member States who were on the ground. Froehlich encouraged the USG to provide detailed arguments, as it did with Hizballah, to facilitate Clearinghouse support for future, potentially contentious, designation requests.

3. (S) Froelich said that certain Member States objected to designating Hizballah, because they continued to believe the organization could play a constructive role in the Middle East Peace Process. According to Froehlich, the Hizballah designation was a "high-level political issue," and he suggested some Member States wanted additional, detailed information on Hizballah activities for political cover.
Brown